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ABSTRACT

In 1991, a study was conducted of the liberal arts education in American community colleges, comparing 1991 curriculum and enrollment data with information compiled in previous years (i.e., 1975, 1977, 1983, and 1986). Data were obtained by requesting catalogues and class schedules from every fifth college listed in the directory of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. Course sections listed in the catalogues were categorized according to 13 pre-determined disciplines and 60 subfields, and additional enrollment data were obtained from the individual colleges for randomly selected courses. Courses were classified as remedial, introductory, or advanced. Study findings, focusing particularly on the humanities curricula, included the following: (1) of the 119,884 course sections offered for credit in 162 community colleges, 57,970 were in the liberal arts; (2) 23% of the liberal arts classes were in the humanities, up from 17% in 1986; (3) about 90% of the colleges offered courses in the traditional disciplines of history, literature, and political science, while religious studies, and social and ethnic studies were offered by the smallest number of colleges; (4) in recent years, more colleges were offering courses in jurisprudence, business law, African-American and Hispanic literature, English as a Second Language (ESL), and jazz appreciation; (5) while in 1977, foreign languages accounted for 21% of all humanities class sections, by 1991, this figure had increased to 36%, due in large part to ESL offerings; and (6) class size remained relatively stable over the years. Detailed data tables are included. (PAA)

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Arthur M. Cohen

Presentation to the National Conference, Community College Humanities Association, San Francisco, November 15, 1991

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Since 1975 when the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded a grant to the Center for the Study of Community Colleges for the purpose of tracking the humanities in community colleges nationwide, the Center has periodically tabulated course offerings, enrollments, and other data pertaining to students and faculty in this curriculum area. Today's report is concerned with curriculum and enrollments, comparing the data for 1991 with those obtained in similar tallies in prior years. These data are extracted from a broader study of the liberal arts in the community colleges of America, currently being conducted for the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer.

Methodology

The data are obtained by sampling the colleges listed in the Directory published by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. Beginning at a random number, every fifth college name is pulled from the directory and a letter addressed to the college president asking for a copy of the current year catalogue and a class schedule for spring term. As the materials arrive, the sample is balanced by size to ensure that a proportionate number of small (under 1500 students), medium, and large (over 6000 students) colleges is included. The class sections listed in the class schedules are noted and, where the

title of the course does not reveal the category in which the course should be placed, we check the catalogue for a full description. Where that proves inadequate, we phone the college academic office.

After the sections are categorized, we list every tenth class section at random in each of the academic disciplines and ask the colleges to send enrollment figures for those classes. This enables us to estimate the number of sections canceled and also to calculate the enrollment in each course. Some of the colleges provide specific enrollment figures for each class section as requested, while others send the entire enrollment printout and allow us to pick off the classes that we choose.

In this study, as in our prior reports, we list thirteen disciplines within the humanities and sixty subfields among those disciplines:

History
- State and local
- Western world
- United States
- Other world regions
- Special groups
- Social history

Political Science
- American government
- Local/city/state
- Comparative
- Tools and methods
- Specialized (topical)
- Jurisprudence

Literature
- Introduction/survey
- Genre
- Authors
- Group
- Bible
- Popular
- Classics

Foreign languages
- French
- German
- Italian
- Russian
- Spanish
- Career-related Spanish
- English as a second language
- Classics
- Asian
- Other

Fine and Performing Arts Appreciation
- Interdisciplinary/survey
- Theater
- Film
- Specialized

Philosophy
- Introduction/history
- Ethics
- Logic
- Religious
- Specialized

Art history/appreciation
- Introduction/history-appreciation
- Specialized culture
- Other specialized art

Music history/appreciation
- Introduction/survey
- Jazz
- Specialized

Cultural anthropology
- Introduction/survey
- American Indian
- Folklore/magic/mythology
- Other specialized

Social/ethnic studies
- Ethnic
- Women
- Individual

Religious studies
- Introduction/survey
- Specialized
- Texts

Cultural geography
- Introduction/survey
- Specialized/regional

Interdisciplinary Humanities
Two or more Humanities areas
Science and Humanities
Science and Literature
History or Philosophy of Science

The courses are also coded as remedial, introductory, or advanced, according to the following criteria:

Remedial. High school refresher courses or less-than-college-level courses, whether or not they carry institutional credit, are considered remedial. This category includes both remedial and developmental English. In addition to English, subject areas which generally offer remedial courses are math, biology, chemistry, and earth and space sciences.

Introductory. Introductory classes are those beginning college-level courses which require no other college-level prerequisite. Some catalogues state that an introductory class may require a certain English or math or reading proficiency level for admission into the class. But if the proficiency level is that which is required for normal beginning-level college coursework, the course is considered introductory.

Advanced. Any course that requires a college-level prerequisite in the same or a related discipline is advanced. Foreign languages are coded as advanced only at the third and fourth year levels. ESL follows the same categories as other foreign languages.

Findings.

A total of 119,884 course sections were offered for credit in 162 community colleges. Of these, 57,970 were in the liberal arts, and 23 percent of the liberal arts classes were in the

humanities, up from 17 percent in 1986.

The findings have been categorized according to the percentage of community colleges offering humanities courses in the various subfields, the percentage of total humanities classes by subject area, the percentage of courses in remedial, introductory, and advanced categories, and the average class size in the courses. These data, displayed in the following tables, are also compared with data from prior years, where they were available.

Table 1

Percentage of Community Colleges Offering Humanities Courses During Spring Term

Humanities Subject Area	1975 (N=156)	1977 (N=178)	1983 (N=173)	1986 (N=95)	1991 (N=162)
History	90%	92%	93%	92%	91%
State and local	28	26	31	25	30
Western world	82	83	76	71	74
United States	87	88	85	83	86
Other world regions	28	23	26	25	25
Special groups	29	30	26	23	36
Social history	25	28	20	23	9
Political Science	89	94	90	86	90
American government	75	82	71	75	80
Local/city/state	40	40	35	40	38
Comparative	23	20	28	25	24
Tools and methods	26	26	15	3	5
Specialized (topical)	18	15	32	26	12
Jurisprudence	30	34	33	36	61
Literature	91	92	93	87	91
Introduction/survey	84	87	80	74	54
Genre	38	36	35	41	36
Authors	20	17	24	23	15
Group	24	22	22	22	71
Bible	6	6	12	6	9
Popular	15	16	11	9	6
Classics	10	9	10	3	15

Foreign languages	82	80	82	78	86
French	60	56	57	59	62
German	40	38	45	41	36
Italian	11	12	17	16	14
Russian	9	7	4	5	11
Spanish	70	68	72	68	77
Career-related Spanish	6	10	6	1	3
English as a Second Language	26	33	27	38	41
Classics	4	5	5	5	5
Other	8	11	15	15	24
Miscellaneous	50	51	61	69	47
Interdisciplinary/survey	28	28	38	52	45
Theater	24	26	34	26	32
Film	12	16	21	17	23
Specialized	19	18	16	12	4
Philosophy	66	64	68	76	74
Introduction/history	56	56	54	58	61
Ethics	25	23	29	37	37
Logic	26	26	29	28	43
Religious	21	18	21	34	20
Specialized	15	19	20	13	9
Art history/appreciation	70	68	76	76	80
Introduction/history/appreciation	69	67	84	77	78
Specialized culture	3	6	6	13	15
Other specialized art	7	7	12	6	15
Music history/appreciation	74	70	69	63	71
Introduction/survey	73	68	75	62	70
Jazz	3	6	9	8	10
Specialized	7	7	4	13	12
Cultural anthropology	44	46	44	48	46
Introduction/survey	39	42	41	45	44
American Indian	4	5	8	7	3
Folklore/magic/mythology	1	2	1	NA	7
Other specialized	12	11	6	14	5
Social/ethnic studies	22	21	10	(inc.	15
Ethnic	15	15	6	in	9
Women	3	3	4	history	3
Individual	1	1	2	and	1
Other	12	11	4	lit.)	4
Religious studies	26	28	24		22
Introduction/survey	12	14	15	(inc.	15
Specialized	10	11	8	in	4
Texts	16	17	12	philos.)	8
Cultural Geography	26	22	34	NA	24
Introduction/survey	26	21	32		22
Specialized/regional	3	1	5		3

Table 2
Percentage of Total Humanities Class Sections in Each Subject Area

Discipline	1977 (N=178)	1983 (N=173)	1986 (N=95)	1991 (N=162)
Cultural anthropology	3.2%	2.1%	2.7%	1.5%
Art history/appreciation	3.8	4.2	5.7	4.2
Foreign Languages	20.5	27.7	28.4	36.3
History	23.0	19.9	21.5	20.1
Interdisciplinary Humanities	7.2	7.3	5.7	6.2
Literature	11.4	11.2	10.0	8.1
Music appreciation	3.3	3.4	4.8	3.6
Philosophy	6.4	6.2	7.8	7.6
Political Science	16.6	14.7	13.5	12.4
Religious Studies	1.5	1.4	(inc. in philosophy)	(inc. in philosophy)
Social/ethnic studies	3.1	1.9	(inc. in history)	(inc. in history)

Table 3
Percentage of Remedial, Standard and Advanced Courses by Subject

Subject Area	Remedial	Standard	Advanced	Total	%Remed.	%Stand.	%Adv.
Art history/appreciation	0	561	15	576	0.0%	97.4%	2.6%
Cultural anthropology	0	206	5	211	0.0%	97.6%	2.4%
English	4021	6444	2542	13007	30.9%	49.5%	19.5%
Foreign Languages	0	3213	1815	5028	0.0%	63.9%	36.1%
History	0	2526	165	2691	0.0%	93.9%	6.1%
Interdisciplinary Humanities (& Cult. Geog)	12	555	30	597	2.0%	93.0%	5.0%
Literature	0	843	280	1123	0.0%	75.1%	24.9%
Fine & performing arts appreciation/history	0	244	23	267	0.0%	91.4%	8.6%
Music history/apprec.	0	479	14	493	0.0%	97.2%	2.8%
Political Science	11	1590	116	1717	0.6%	92.6%	6.8%
Philosophy (including Religious Studies)	0	1039	15	1054	0.0%	98.6%	1.4%
Social/ethnic studies	0	97	2	99	0.0%	98.0%	2.0%
As a % of Total Humanities Remedial, Standard, and Advanced Courses	4044	17797	5022	26863	15.1%	66.3%	18.7%
As a percent of total Liberal Arts courses	6123	38827	13020	57970	6.9%	30.8%	8.7%

Table 4
Average Class Size in Community College Humanities Courses

Humanities Subject Area	Average Class Size 1977	Average Class Size 1991
History	33	31
Political science/government/law	31	29
Foreign languages	19	20
Literature	23	23
Interdisciplinary humanities	37	35
Philosophy (inc. Religious studies)	27	29
Art history/appreciation	31	28
Music history/appreciation	30	26
Cultural anthropology	31	30
Fine and performing arts history/appreciation	N.A.	28
Social/ethnic studies	22	26

The typical academic disciplines are well represented in the community colleges. Around 90 percent of the colleges offer history, literature, and political science. Foreign languages and art history and appreciation are found in more than 80 percent. The religious studies and social and ethnic studies are among the disciplines offered in the smallest number of institutions.

In recent years more colleges are offering jurisprudence, typically courses in the philosophical implications in the administration of justice; and in business law, counted in the humanities if the course is described as being primarily theoretical or as an introductory political science class. Many more colleges are offering courses in the literature of various groups, reflecting the African-American and Hispanic literature classes that have become widespread. Similarly, the history of

special groups, in particular the study of particular ethnic groups has increased. More colleges are offering logic, a category within philosophy, and more are offering foreign languages, especially ESL, Spanish, and Russian. Other categories that have penetrated additional colleges include courses in film, and in music appreciation, especially jazz.

Fewer colleges are offering the general introductory or survey course in literature; special or topical courses in political science; authors courses in literature; and American Indian courses in cultural anthropology.

The percentage of the humanities classes offered in the various subject areas has shifted notably over the years. Foreign languages in 1977 accounted for 21 percent of the humanities class sections, whereas in 1991, it had increased to 36 percent, by far the greatest number in any discipline. The more than 300,000 students who are taking ESL classes weight those figures. Much of the percentage increase was at the expense of literature which dropped from 11 to 8 percent and political science which went from 17 to 12 percent.

Remedial courses are not typically found in the humanities. Most courses offered are introductory; that is, they do not carry a prerequisite. But a number of advanced level courses are offered in foreign languages and in literature.

Average class size showed little change between 1977 and 1991. The foreign language classes are the smallest, averaging 20 students each, and the interdisciplinary humanities are the

largest, averaging 35 students. The other disciplines in the humanities typically enroll between 26 and 31 students per class.

A few colleges in the sample showed extremes in course offerings in certain areas. As example, in comparison with English classes, one college offered well over twice as much English as a Second Language. Another college had 25 percent more ESL than English. Well over 50 percent of the students in both those colleges are non-native English speakers.

Other notes of interest in this first look at the data show that although the community colleges enroll sizable proportions of ethnic minority students, little ethnic studies per se is offered. The ethnic emphases come through the courses in Asian, Chicano, or Afro-American history and literature. The organization of Departments of Ethnic Studies is not an important issue in the community colleges. Here the institutions differ from the universities where the department is the power base for faculty who hope to gain resources on the way toward codifying academic disciplines. In this respect the community college is a lagging indicator as opposed to its being a leading indicator in business and occupational education where student interest showed up earlier and the institutions offered courses in many of those fields before the universities did.

Conclusions

The humanities and the liberal arts in the community colleges are intact. They have maintained their credibility in the face of various assaults on curriculum in all of higher

education. Deconstructionism has not afflicted them. Calls for empowering students have not been heeded. The United States as an oppressor nation is not taught. Instead, students study what is useful to them and members of minority groups have received jobs as teachers, counselors, and administrators; therefore role models are in place. The community college serves as an empowering institution for what it is, more than for what it says. The students use the colleges as a way into society. They have been derided as being excessively practical, and the staff also have been criticized for being too conservative. But in the last decade of the twentieth century, practicality and conservatism stand as beacons.

Despite the specifications for curricular sequence that the catalogues note, the students attend classes according to their own interests and available time. Nonetheless, the elements of core curriculums are in place and further analysis of the data from the other liberal arts fields (science, social science, English, mathematics, and fine and performing arts) may reveal their outline more clearly.

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